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ABSTRACT

This study examined 16 male and female career switchers currently enrolled in or recently graduated from a teacher education program to investigate how they differed in their motivations and career experiences. Structured surveys investigated their career motivations, obstacles encountered, and salient factors that brought them to teaching. Results indicated that both males and females wanted to be in the classroom, felt they could make a difference, and expressed a commitment to teaching. They overwhelmingly wanted to teach at the secondary school level and were entering such critical shortage areas as science and math (as well as English as a Second Language and special education). More females than males planned to teach in urban schools. When they were undergraduate and graduate students, they had considered teaching an unintellectual and easy major with poor pay and lack of respect for teaching primary deterrents to teaching. Career switchers switched because they desired to make a difference and to pursue meaningful work. Many of the career switchers were inspired by a motivating teacher. Both men and women only slightly favored advancing gender balance in teaching. (SM)

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Career Changers: Women (and Men) Who Switch to Teaching

Phyllis K. Lerner and Karen Zittleman

2002

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Career Changers: Women (and Men) Who Switch to Teaching

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1. PROBLEM FORMULATION

- DEVELOP STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During much of the 20th century, the average U.S. woman directed her employment energies to only a few *acceptable* areas, such as secretary, nurse and teacher. Yet as the modern feminist movement emerged, these women were to become the first generation of teachers to actively discourage their own daughters from teaching. The message to their daughters was "You can be all we couldn't". Women left familiar neighborhoods to move up and away, attending highly selective colleges and parting with traditional vocations.

Yet, a number of these women are returning to teaching: Why are they leaving non-traditional careers, sometimes lucrative and prestigious positions, in order to become teachers? How do male and female career switchers differ in their motivations and career experiences? This study will attempt to answer such questions by analyzing 16 career switchers (7 female and 9 male) currently enrolled or recently graduated from teacher education at The American University in Washington, D.C. Through a structured survey, career switchers were asked to share career motivations, obstacles encountered, and salient factors that brought them to teaching. The results may suggest recruitment avenues and strategies for teacher education programs, and are intended to initiate a productive discussion among teacher educators.

- LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on career switchers into teaching is generally characterized by "its' absence."
KEY POINTS:

- Alternative certification includes, but is far from limited to, career switchers. One dramatic change is that people are beginning to teach later in life.
- It's estimated that nearly 30% of the teachers who completed Teacher Education programs in 1998, began their preparation at the postbaccalaureate level.
- Despite the growth of alternative programs, the proportion of teachers from the programs is low (estimated at 7.5 % for 1984-94 decade) but the financial investment is substantial.
- Career switching has been directed to increase staffing of teachers of color, retired military personnel, paraeducators, aerospace and defense workers, math, science, special education, bilingual education and urban (hard to staff) schools. Gender is targeted indirectly by subject area and background (science and military) rather than by role modeling and diversifying our workforce. Not surprisingly, career switchers are older first year teachers.
- A typical claim of alternative programs is that the content is the same (or similar)—the delivery is the difference. A review of the Los Angeles program identifies much less rigor with "no formal assignments or examinations" and major attention to "the LAUSD's approach to curriculum and instruction."
- An additional claim of alternative programs is that they will bring in a more academically qualified group of teachers.
- Present in all of the alternative programs was mentoring. This goal has drawn attention to the value of mentoring for all new teachers.
- Most teachers who completed graduate degree TE programs (from the 1950's-1980s) opted for suburban schools.
- Alternative programs have been able to recruit more people of color into teaching; participants are more likely to have attended a school in an urban community. Six of eight (LA Intern Programs) held higher expectations for low income and minority youth.

- Teacher retention (and retention at hard-to-staff sites) is an important question. Elementary teachers, prepared in tradition programs, are most likely to have plans to remain. On the other side, many career switchers (40%) moving into math instruction, plan to move up to high education. So, the variance by subject specialties is key.
- Comparisons of teacher effectiveness (between alternative and traditional preparation) remain vague and are of limited value in drawing conclusions about instructional quality.
- Advocates should not lose site of the need for improved salaries and working conditions (particularly in urban and rural schools).
- Rather than continue the debate between models, we should gain better understanding of the components of a good preparation program (regardless of structure) and develop and support multiple paths.

(Points are drawn from Zeichner, Kenneth M. and Schulte, Ann K. (September/October 2001) What We Know and Don't Know From Peer-Reviewed Research About Alternative Teacher Certification Programs, V 52(4) *Journal of Teacher Education* pp. 266-282.)

2. PLANNING FOR DATA COLLECTION

- DEVELOP AND PILOT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

3. DATA COLLECTION

- VIA WEBSITE ZOOMERANG SURVEY << http://www.zoomerang.com/index.zgi>>

4. DATA ANALYSIS

5. SHARING AND REPORTING OF DATA

- PRESENTATION PAPER FOR AERA
- POPULAR JOURNAL ARTICLE

Numerous articles in the popular press have covered stories (anecdotally) of those who make the move to teaching. These heart-warming tales may serve (and have served) to motivate career switchers and influenced our decision to write a popular journal article. Questions to examine include: How can we invest our professional energies to bring more quality teachers into the profession? Will current educators inspire their own students to teach? Will motivating lessons move children to think about a career in education? Will standards and testing undermine enthusiastic teachers, who then switch out of the field? Will salaries (and bonus benefits) draw more adults into the classroom? As each teacher faces her or his room, which children's faces might join the future teaching ranks?

CONTACT KAREN ZITTLEMAN << kzittleman@earthlink.net >> FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT.

Dear American University School of Education Student,

This survey is part of a research project on individuals who decide to change careers and become teachers. Phyllis Lerner and Karen Zittleman from the School of Education are undertaking this study. If you are groaning, "yet another survey," wait! This isn't your typical paper-and-pencil fill-in-the blanks task. It's a secure, Web-based survey. With the click of your mouse, you will contribute to cutting-edge research in the field, help us complete a project for presentation at the American Education Research Association's national conference, and yes, have fun on a site that may prove helpful in your own studies. Unlike so many other Internet tasks, we don't even want your name and credit card number!

As you probably know, a substantial body of research now documents the national teacher shortage, and career switchers could play a critical role in filling the need. Little is known, however, about what motivates this job change. Through this survey, career switchers will be asked to share career motivations, obstacles encountered, and salient factors that brought them into teaching. The results may suggest recruitment avenues, special funding and strategies for teacher education programs as well as provide possible directions for pre-service curriculum development and instruction.

The survey requires about 15 minutes to complete. All responses will remain strictly anonymous and confidential. To access the survey, simply click on the link below (LINK IS PROVIDED IN THE EMAIL INVITATION SENT BY THE HOST SITE, ZOOMERANG. LINK IS ASSIGNED ONCE THE SURVEY IS SENT). If you have any questions, please contact:

Karen Zittleman
Doctoral Student
School of Education
American University
kzittleman@earthlink.net or 202.364.3618

We would appreciate completion of this survey by February XX, 2002.

Your time and responses are appreciated. Thank you!

Sincerely,
Phyllis Lerner
Adjunct Professor

Karen Zittleman
Doctoral Student
School of Education
American University

Survey & Results

1. Undergraduate major/degree(s)

Females
1. philosophy
2. Biology/pre-med
3. Spanish
4. Government
5. English
6. History
7. fine arts

Males
1. English
2. English/studio arts
3. Geography/environmental studies
4. mathematics
5. biology
6. criminal justice
7. criminal justice
8. Journalism
9. history

2. Graduate major/degree(s)

Females
1. law degree
2. none
3. none
4. law; masters in literature
5. none
6. History
7. none

Males
1. Education
2. masters in fine arts
3. Master of Management
4. engineering
5. none
6. law degree
7. systems management, national security affairs, literature
8. teaching certificate secondary education
9. none

3. Current employment

Females
1. student
2. secondary science teacher
3. middle school ESL, math and science teacher
4. student
5. Editor of independent newspaper
6. student
7. part-time teacher and museum art workshop coordinator

Males

1. teacher
2. none
3. student (formerly with National Parks Conservation Association; NASDAQ trader)
4. NASA physical engineer
5. retired from Navy
6. lawyer
7. university staff
8. residential life--university
9. student teaching

4. What grade level do you plan to teach?

	Primary	Upper Elementary	Middle	Secondary	Unsure	Other*
Females	0%	0%	22%	11%	0%	14%
Males	0%	0%	11%	89%	0%	0%
All	0%	0%	19%	75%	0%	6%

[* No explanation given]

Pattern: Career switchers overwhelmingly plan to teach at the secondary level.

5. What subject area do you plan to teach?

	Science/Math	Social Studies	English	Art	ESL	Special Education
Females	29%	29%	29%	14%	14%	0%
Males	33%	33%	33%	11%	0%	11%
All	31%	31%	31%	12%	6%	6%

[Note that percentages exceed 100 for females and males due to multiple responses.]

Pattern: Career switchers are entering critical shortage subject areas, such as science and math and to a lesser degree, ESL and special education.

6. Where would you plan to teach?

	Urban School	Suburban School	Rural School	Unsure	Other*
Females	43%	14%	0%	29%	14%
Males	33%	33%	0%	22%	11%
All	38%	25%	0%	25%	13%

[* No explanation given]

Pattern: More females than males are planning to teach in urban schools. More women than men are unsure of where they will teach.

7. In 5-10 years do you see yourself as a...

	Teacher	School Counselor	Educational Administrator	Other*
Females	100%	0%	0%	0%
Males	56%	0%	22%	22%
All	75%	0%	13%	13%

[* No explanation given]

Pattern: Both women and men career switchers want to be in the classroom. A small percentage of men, and no women, expressed a desire to move out of the classroom into administration.

8. **Describe your reasons for choosing your answer in question #7.**
Patterns: Women and men feel they can make difference in the classroom and express a commitment to teaching.

Females:
1. I like the challenge; makes law seem like a breeze
2. I have found that I love teaching
3. Front line trooper—I expect it will take me that long to get really resally (sic) really gooood
4. I am entering the profession with the intention of teaching
5. I feel like I can make the most difference in the heart of the classroom rather than in the administrative chambers. I see freedom in the classroom.
6. I look forward to a long, successful career as a teacher. I hope to make a difference in the classroom.
7. I am committed to this decision.

Males:
1. like working with kids directly
2. I like teaching
3. Although I hope to have some administrative responsibilities, may main goal currently is to get in front of the classroom!
4. I envision starting a charter school, one for disadvantaged, inner city youth.
5. why not?
6. once I have an understanding of what children need to achieve, I want to make the need program and policy happen
7. logistics—have to put a kid through college
8. No ambition to be an administrator—want to be in the classroom with the kids
9. it's want I do. I may change levels and try to teach history/government of politics at a collegiate level but teaching is my goal.

9. **When you chose your undergraduate major and/or previous graduate degrees, did you consider teaching as a career? What were your thoughts about teaching at that time?**
Patterns: For men and women, teaching was considered "unintellectual", an easy major. The lack of respect for teaching as a profession and poor pay were primary deterrents to teach. Women had never really thought about teaching and chose more *ambitious* careers. Two men had considered it but family and financial obligations overrode their interest.

Females
1. Something for the less ambitious
2. I grew up near a University where students who failed out of there (sic) major went into teaching so I had a very poor image of people who were teachers.
3. Under grad-no way-no interest- no sense of aptitude
4. As an undergrad, I did not consider teaching - I was sure I wanted to be a lawyer. - Prior to entering law school I had a teaching experience that lead me to consider teaching... the memory of teaching kept reasserting itself and I decided to change careers. I went back to get my MA with teaching in mind.
5. Marmish
6. When I chose history as my major, I kept an open mind where I might land in life following school. As an undergraduate, I took history, 30 credits in business and science...to be well rounded candidate. In grad school I was fortunate to ta and I loved my teaching experiences...I sense I might really have an aptitude for teaching when the other tas asked how I was able to get the students to do the assignments...and I noticed that the 2 times I gave lectures in front of the entire class...the students applauded when I finished my lecture.
7. No I did not. I was convinced that I would be God's gift to graphic design on Madison Ave. I got very close but it all stopped making sense to me...It was not satisfying.

Males

1. Not really, figured I would be working in Business Management
2. Yes, I thought teaching would be an interesting life.
3. I chose my undergrad degree because it lit a fire in me (geography/ environment). However, I always thought I would go into corporate work until I could afford to switch to teaching. I didn't think I would ever be able to afford to make the move...foremost among my priorities was my family. I pursued my MBA with NO thoughts of teaching...to support corporate pursuits before teaching, if ever...
4. I wanted something different. I had been a student all my life and wanted to see what I could do beyond school. I didn't get how teaching made a difference.
5. The military paid for school so I owed them. Teaching wasn't even a consideration
6. Not enough money
7. Did not consider it. Were situational degrees required for work.
8. Never considered it until well into my career
9. Yes, it's what I wanted to do but was not prepared at my graduation time to start teaching

10. What work or other experiences (in or outside the home) did you pursue following your bachelor's and/or graduate degree(s)? Why?

Females

1. tax attorney
2. Optometric technician
3. escort officer, US State Dept.; proposal writer, interpreter, part tiem ESL teacher, dancer, waitress
4. Jesuit Volunteer Corp. Clerked for a federal judge and worked as litigation associate for large law firm
5. editor
6. Director of public relations, producer, and assistant director for continuing education. I had to quickly join the nonprofit sector after grad school when we bought a home and needed money for the mortgage and food!
7. Commercial Art studies, and public relations. Both were art-related position and paid reasonably well.

Males

1. Own my own company (still do) in the entertainment industry
2. Worked in museums and as an architectural draftsperson
3. 5 yrs in transportation industry; 9 yrs in finance industry (Nasdaq); 2-3 yrs in non-profit development. The first 15 yrs were to earn enough salary to save up, support my family, and someday pursue what I wanted to do. The 2-3 non-profit years were to explore the non-profit environmental world to guage (sic) how ell I could contribute there.
4. NASA engineer
5. military service
6. lawyer
7. collegiate athletic administration
8. --
9. chef/sous chef, retail assistant, manager (bookstore), caterer, extensive traveler

11. At what point in your life did you decide to become a teacher?

Patterns: Women and men switched careers motivated by a desire to *make a difference* and pursue *meaningful* work. One woman mentioned money but five expressed a need for meaningful work. Six expressed a drive for meaningful work.

Females

1. When I felt financially secure to pursue meaningful work
2. When I saw an as in National geographic for Teach for America. I figured it was a way for me to work and do volunteer work at the same time (since I was spending a lot of time doing volunteer work)
3. –
4. After working for 3 years with a large firm and following a 9 month trip with my husband
5. When writing no longer felt rewarding
6. …when I realized that in each of my nonprofit jobs that I enjoyed doing and did best related to teaching-more positive contribution to society by being in front of a class
7. Two years ago it occurred to me that I had a lot of knowledge and talent acquired on both on and off the job and I want to pass it on

Males

1. Liked coaching and thought I would be a better role model if I were also a teacher
2. 2 years ago. I was treated for a learning disability and then felt competent to teach.
3. Although I always dreamed of it…I didn't pursue it until 15 years in corporate work and then I tried my hand at environmental non-profit work…when this proved less fulfilling. I decided to pursue my long-time distant goal of teaching!
4. I wanted to make an immediate difference in society. I also see my younger colleagues entering the profession without much ambition or commitment, in my opinion. I want to instill a passion in students.
5. I've always been interested in teaching
6. I wanted a higher calling a teaching was it
7. A couple of years ago. Tired of my current career (university staff)
8. About 6-7 years into my career started work towards master's in order to teach…got job offer couldn't pass up, so scrapped teaching plans…kept it in mind until I decided to leave athletics and good opportunity came up to get the certificate via a tuition waiver only about 2 years ago…20 years into career
9. Early on. it always appealled (sic) to me

12. Did some person or event encourage you to become a teacher? Describe.

Patterns: A motivating teacher inspired many career switchers—they as well as wanting to *make a difference* in schools and society. There was little (if any) distinction by gender.

Females

1. I wanted to make a difference, a real difference, in people's lives> Rather than help people find loop holes in the tax law, I want to help all children rich and poor, have the opportunity to earn money AND commit to public service
2. My husband's grandmother was a highly esteemed teacher in her community. Everyone loved her and her teaching style. I am told that I am like her in a lot of ways—a true compliment.
3. Small series of causes/events. Pregnancy need for something stable
4. The memory of my teaching experience during the Jesuit Volunteer Corps was the primary impetus. My husband was very supportive of my choice.
5. As an aditor (sic), I wrote about the need for teachers. Finally I thought, hey I can become one and make a difference.
6. Throughout my life, I've always loved reading and learning and I finally realized what Joseph Campbell meant when he said, "Follow your bliss." For me, that is to teach.
7. Yes, a wonderful friend in the education dept in the art museum where I worked in for many years, encourage me. I found the staff of the Ed Dept there to be very supportive of educational endeavors both directly related to the museum and to colleagues' endeavors as well.

Males

1. The head coach at the time
2. Yes, 30% tuition discount at AU coupled with fed support for a learning disability

3. Sept 11th was definitely an influence. I looked at my career and said, "This is not fulfilling. I want to contribute to the maximum extend possible, and this isn't it." Other than that, I had several teachers in high school and especially college...who were my mentors—they indirectly influenced my decision in a major way.
4. Growing up in a single family home, my teachers became part of my family. They helped me see the possibilities beyond my narrow survival existence. I have always admired teachers.
5. After retiring from the military, I knew I wanted to be involved in public service. The newspaper advertisement for a certification picqued (sic) my interest.
6. It was a gradual realization.
7. No
8. My best high school teachers probably planted the seed about what it would be like...some college profs also impacted
9. Past teachers impressed me, learning and studying have always interested me, passing out knowledge and encouraging others excites me

13. From the list below, rank your reasons or motivations to teach. Please rank responses with a 1 being your most important reason and so on.

	Rank	
[redacted]		Male
Enjoy working with children	1	Enjoy working with children
Value the subject area	2	Value the subject area
Professional fulfillment	3	Professional fulfillment
Variety of activities	4	Work and vacation schedules
Work and vacation schedules	5	Variety of activities
Collegial rapport	6	Collegial rapport & Job autonomy and control
Job security	7	
Job autonomy and control	8	Job security
Salary and benefits package	9	Stepping stone to admin. or other non-teaching position
Stepping stone to admin. or other non-teaching position	10	Salary and benefit package

14. Is it a worthwhile goal to achieve gender balance in the teaching force at all grade levels and across the curriculum?

	Yes	No
Females	57%	43%
Males	56%	44%
All	56%	44%

Patterns: Both men and women only slightly favor advancing gender balance in teaching. Those supporting gender equity emphasize (a) the importance of role models and diversity; and (b) the possibility of increasing the respect for and salaries of teachers if more men were in the field. Women and men who do not support gender balance contend that a more important concern is recruiting qualified and effective teachers.

15. Explain your answer to question #14?

Patterns: Both men and women only slightly favor advancing gender balance in teaching. Those supporting gender equity emphasize (a) the importance of role models and diversity; and (b) the possibility of increasing the respect for and salaries of teachers if more men were in the field. Women and men who do not support gender balance contend that a more important concern is recruiting qualified and effective teachers.

Females
Yes: 57% (4 out of 7)
No: 43% (3 out of 7)

1. Preparing quality teachers is important. If more men enter the profession fine, but with all the problems facing kids and schools, gender parity pales. (n)
2. why wouldn't it be (y)
3. Oveer (sic) all gender balance would be nice, but I don'y (sic) see is as moer (sic) important than getting competent teachers at all levels. (n)
4. That's a tough one....More important to me than "gender equity" in teaching is raising public respect for teaching and all profession that have been traditionally dominated by women. I think that the reason that men have been reluctant to join the rank and file of teaching is that such jobs have been viewed as "women's work." The answer for me is not simply to add more men to the profession but as a society to address the question of the undervaluing of women's work and women generally. (n)
5. Boys need good role models and may be motivated to perform better by a male. (y)
6. Students should have access to role models that reflect healthy gender balance. (y)
7. I think it can only benefit students across the board to have more diverse role models in the classroom. I do believe that there are certain personalities that are better suited to teaching and that these personalities can be male or female. No one gender has a monopoly on those abilities and skills. (y)

Males
Yes: 56% (5 out of 9)
No: 44% (4 out of 9)

1. Better goal is to achieve good teachers at all positions, regardless of gender (n)
2. It is valuable to have a variety of gender role models as teachers. If there is a gender balance in teaching there may be an improvement in teachers' salaries (y)
3. Such gender balance is important for two reasons—1. to mitigate or eliminate traditional gender stereotypes affiliated with certain grade levels (women only as elementary school teachers) and professions (men=science/math) and, somewhat related 2. to provide ample role-models of both sexes at all levels and subjects (y)
4. Teaching may gain more professional credibility when more men enter the profession (y)
5. ok, maybe race, but it takes commitment and concern to teach and frankly not many men have that (n)
6. effective, caring teachers are needed, regardless of their gender (n)
7. Profession that impacts our kids as strontly (sic)) as teaching does should feature strong gender balance...variety of complicated sociological reasons (y)
8. What the teacher looks like is immaterial. It's what's being taught that's important. The correct term is "sex." Gender refers to a noun and pronoun choice. (n)
9. there should be gender, racial, and religious balance, exposure to more ideas and people promotes a better understanding for all (y)

16. Demographics

	Females	Males	All
Gender	44%	56%	100%
Race			
American Indian or Alaska Native Asian	0%	0%	0%
Asian	0%	0%	0%
Black or African American	0%	0%	0%
Hispanic or Latino	0%	0%	0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%
White	100%	100%	100%

Two or more races	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	0%	0%
Age			
20-30 years old	29%	11%	19%
31-40 years old	14%	22%	19%
41-50 years old	43%	56%	50%
51-60 years old	14%	11%	13%
61-70 years old	0%	0%	0%
71 and older	0%	0%	0%

6. ACTION PLANNING

- IMPLICATIONS FOR FINDINGS IN THE FIELD

Application Activity for AERA Interactive Session

What do Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush have in common?

They are themselves "career switchers," and are working together to recruit midcareer professionals into education. 2.2 million teachers must be hired in the next decade to handle the expected surge in retirements.

The Washington Times
2/27/2002

"Your spreadsheets won't ever grow up to be doctors and lawyers."

"No one goes back 10 years later to thank a middle manager."

Subway Car Advertisements [The New York City Subway System (2001-1)]

Given the patterns and points to ponder from this project, generate an inspirational slogan to bring adults into teaching.

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